CHAPTER ONE

KISAN[1]

cc *The first and most important business of a government is, after all> to contrive that its people live and not die."*

MATTHAI: *"Village Government in British India"*

COME WITH ME to an Indian village.

It will not be easy to reach, especially in the rainy season, for there are no means of communication other than a jolting bullock-cart. These rough and uneven paths are quite unsuitable for a horse-to?zg#, while a motor-car would be out of the question. There are no metalled roads for miles and the primitive tracks are fall of dust and dirt in summer and, in the rains, a sea of mud. Arrived at your destination, painfully hot, for there are no trees on the way to give their gracious shade, you find a little cluster of mud-huts with thatched roofs. In Bengal they may be made of sticks and straw or corrugated iron. Winds and rain wreck havoc, and it is a painful sight to see the inhabitants moving their cots from one spot to another in order to avoid the leaks. The walls are plastered with mud; lime for whitewashing is a costly luxury and the people cannot afford it. My mind harks back to the trim white farms that so enliven the landscape of Denmark. Here cow-dung mixed with earth must suffice.

No electricity or even kerosene lamps, but earthen lamps in which mustard or neem oil give a flickering light. Oil is sometimes burnt in pots, but the smoke soon makes the air

i Peasant.